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Grunge, Riot Grrrl and the forgetting of women in popular culture

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During the early 1990s, the musical genre of 'grunge' (with its associated cultural trappings such as clothing and certain attitudinal/ political elements) first came to prominence on a large scale when Nirvana's album *Nevermind* unexpectedly became a huge hit. Prior to this, the grunge 'scene' had been centred on Seattle and the Sub Pop record label. Often described as a cross between punk and heavy metal (Mazullo 719), musically grunge had a 'dark', guitar-based sound based around a traditional rock line up (guitar, bass and drums). An unusual feature of the grunge scene was the relatively high proportion of female performers and bands, and this, combined with explicit anti-sexism stances taken by prominent male grunge musicians such as Kurt Cobain, and its close proximity to the feminist Riot Grrrl movement, served to position it as a more gender-neutral scene than many others in 'rock'. However, over time grunge has been reclaimed as a masculine space along the lines of other rock movements.

This paper will examine the processes of remembering and forgetting that have surrounded the women involved in the 'grunge' movement. Evidence will be drawn from present and past media sources, and from interviews with fans of grunge, to show how women are generally written out of historical accounts of music in order to reinscribe the creative dominance of men in this field. This, it is argued, is one of the ways in which the potential for societal change embedded in a cultural form such as grunge is diffused, and the status quo remains ultimately unchallenged.

The empirical evidence used as the basis for this paper is the result of 43 interviews conducted with Australian residents who identified themselves as being fans of grunge during the early 1990s. The respondents were aged between 21 and 45, meaning they were mostly in their mid to late teens during the height of grunge. Two-thirds of the respondents were male and one-third was female. Respondents were recruited through personal contacts, via advertisements in the street press and on music based websites, through fliers left in music stores or distributed at relevant events and through 'snowballing'. Interviews were based around what the respondent remembered about their engagement with grunge and impacts that this had on their identity formation at the time and since. Media sources used include all issues of the *New Musical Express* from 1990 to 1994, and issues of music magazines from 2004 that focused on the tenth anniversary of Kurt Cobain's death.

Examining a cultural phenomenon like grunge retrospectively allows some of the processes behind the creation of cultural memory to be explored. The interaction between individual memories and media representations of the past can be illuminated in this case by the comparison of past media accounts with present media reports and what is said by grunge fans. As memory is so central to the building and maintenance of both individual and collective identity (for example, see Lipsitz, Myszal), it plays a vital role in the maintenance or changing of social structures, in this case patriarchy. Looking at how popular culture is remembered can provide some insights into how the past influences the present.

While respondents spoke in great detail about the memories they had of grunge, this paper will argue that what has been forgotten about grunge is just as important as what has been

remembered. In particular, despite the important contribution of women to the grunge scene, they do not have a strong presence in the memories of either respondents or the media. The woman who is most often remembered, Courtney Love, is used to reinscribe traditional gender relations through condemnation of her rejection of them, although this characterization will not be described in depth in this paper. The other women musicians from the time of grunge and the challenge they made to gender stereotypes (along with male musicians of grunge who were also committed to gender equality) have been either forgotten or re-labelled as ‘Riot Grrrls’. This re-labelling allows the threat being posed to patriarchal relations to be compartmentalised and contained, while the ‘grunge’ label is reinscribed as a form of ‘masculine’ rock.

This paper will first examine the literature around the position of women in rock and in history, before discussing the tendency towards gender equality and underlying feminist stance that existed within grunge, particularly with regard to its relationship to the Riot Grrrl movement it was contemporaneous with, and the media accounts of the time. It will then examine the fate of these tendencies through the accounts of respondents and more recent, retrospective media reports. Finally, it will examine how gender issues associated with grunge are connected to questions of respondents’ gendered identities.

Why do women disappear?

There is a trend within contemporary society for women to become invisible and be forgotten when the past becomes ‘history’. Joan Wallach Scott notes that:

Historians searching the past for evidence about women have confronted again and again the phenomenon of women’s invisibility. Recent research has

shown not that women were inactive or absent from events that made history, but that they have been systematically left out of the official record. In the evaluation of what is important, of what matters to the present in the past, women as individuals or as a definable group rarely receive mention. (5)

This phenomenon of disappearing women has been discovered in many areas of culture and society. For example, the contribution of women such as Harriet Martineau and Beatrice Webb to the early years of the social sciences has only recently been acknowledged as the accepted narrative of the ‘founding fathers’ has been challenged by feminist researchers (McDonald). Furthermore, in their examination of etchers from around the turn of the 20th century, Lang and Lang found that although there were many well-known women etchers when the art form was popular, ‘with few exceptions, neither their names nor their works seemed to have survived’ (269). Lovell notes the failure of most female novelists from the nineteenth century to gain entry into the literary canon and their subsequent disappearance. Even within the history of feminism itself, Henderson notes that early feminist crusaders are often not well known by their contemporary counterparts (see also Sawyer 251).

Numerous reasons for women’s tendency to disappear have been suggested. For example, it could be due to women’s lack of involvement in record keeping (Kleinberg) and their lack of control over the way language and symbols are used to reproduce power structures (Henderson, Wallach Scott, Lovell). Lang and Lang suggest that women may not guard their own legacy as effectively as men, by not ensuring that their works were identifiable, properly catalogued and archived. However, the examples provided by writer such as Wallach Scott regarding the disappearance of women from history in general, and the findings in this paper that show women disappearing well before their deaths, and in circumstances where, in rock music, their work is as well catalogued and as easily accessible as men’s, suggest that being female is in and of itself enough to make being forgotten more likely. Although Wallace

Scott notes that *currently* the voices of women are being heard and recorded in many aspects of modern life (although this does not necessarily guarantee their preservation in the future) this is still for the most part not the case in rock, or ‘serious’ popular music. In fact, women involved in relatively recent music scenes such as punk have already been for the most part omitted from the history of that movement (Reddington), and a similar pattern can be observed with grunge. This can in part be explained by the overall position women hold in popular music.

Many researchers (eg, Shuker 119, Cohen 30) have noted the way women’s contribution to popular music is mostly denigrated as ‘pop’, as opposed to the ‘serious music’ produced by male bands, which reproduces the general association of women with ‘low-brow’ culture and men with the ‘high-brow’ (Huyssen). Even where women have ‘infiltrated’ the rock scene (not an easy prospect; see Bayton, McRobbie and Garber, Whiteley), they are far more likely to be sexualised vocalists than to play instruments. It is also possible that as sounds themselves can be heard as gendered (Järviluoma, Moisala and Vikko), even when women do participate in rock the association of the sound of this music with the masculine is difficult to contest. Furthermore, as Davies argues, the male-dominated press responds to women’s attempts to break into the world of ‘serious music’ by reducing the woman in question to her gender, either through concentrating on her physical attributes or through endless comparisons with other women artists, as though sharing the same gender is enough to make all female artists the same in a way that male artists are not.

Davies demonstrates how the dominant culture within rock journalism can affect what is—and more importantly what *cannot* be—written, how this stems from overarching societal

norms, and shows the effects this can have on readers' perceptions. In particular, she argues that women are not considered capable of producing 'serious' music, usually because the assumptions surrounding what comprises 'serious' music—particularly as regards the issue of credibility—are constructed by a patriarchal music press in a manner that systematically excludes women. Credibility is closely associated with the idea of authenticity, and this is automatically denied to women who are seen as being in any way manipulated or not in control of their own material (eg, by singing other people's songs). If they are not performing their own material, then they cannot be expressing something 'real' about themselves. Credibility is also associated with intelligence and seriousness, and when women display these (for example, by commenting on politics or talking about depression) they are often derided, although male artists doing exactly the same thing are often lionised. Finally, credibility is associated with subcultures and being separate from the 'mainstream', and it 'is difficult for female performers to separate themselves from the mainstream because ... the mainstream is often defined precisely as music associated with girls and women' (Davies 306).

Most significantly, Davies (302) notes that although the press must include women in order to 'create images of themselves and their publications as liberal and non-sexist', this occurs periodically in what is fashioned in each instance as a 'discovery' of the 'new' presence of women in rock. This can occur because retrospective writing on 'serious' popular music excludes the women who may have been at the forefront of any given movement. As Davies (302) explains, the 'exclusion of women from history' means '[w]omen are a perpetual novelty, and each new group of successful female performers is heralded as the first'. Women are also excluded through their absence from the 'canon', as can be seen in the lists of the

‘best’ grunge albums discussed below (see von Appen and Doebling for a discussion of how this occurs).

Grunge, Riot Grrrl and Gender

In an article on the politics of grunge, Shevory identifies gender politics as one of the four main political themes of the movement (along with generational conflict, independent recording, and style). He notes that ‘Grunge supported, and was supported by, an alternative culture that has begun to substantially change the position of women in white rock music’ (Shevory 43). The prominent male figures of grunge, such as Kurt Cobain and Eddie Vedder, were vocal in their support of tolerance and equality, not just for women but also races and sexualities other than white heterosexuals. Kurt Cobain in particular enjoyed playing with gender roles. He allowed his own sexuality to be called into question by often wearing dresses and/or makeup on stage, in film clips and on photo shoots and wrote explicitly feminist songs, such as ‘Sappy’ or ‘Been a Son’. Grunge bands in general avoided imagery that objectified or degraded women. No longer were women in film clips scantily dressed and dancing provocatively, but instead were more often portrayed as equally participating audience or band members.

This time in which grunge was successful in particular saw the rise of the ‘female bass player’ (for example, Kim Gordon, Kim Deal, Sean Yseult). This trend is examined by Clawson, who argues that the feminisation of bass playing through an appeal to stereotypical gender traits (eg, women are good at playing bass because it requires more ‘instinct’ and ‘feeling’) served to devalue the role of the bass player in the band. However, Clawson notes

that this still meant roles as musicians were opening up more to women, which was a step forwards from the almost invisible female musician of before (a claim that itself serves to reinforce the disappearance of earlier female musicians). A number of the female bands associated with grunge, particularly L7, Hole and Babes in Toyland, became commercially successful during this period also. Thus, at the time of its greatest popularity, grunge offered a message of gender equality and presented a higher proportion of women participating as creative band members than had been apparent in recent rock history—particularly in comparison with ‘hair metal’, the hard rock formation that was popular immediately preceding grunge and which was focused on the traditional rock pastimes of groupies and excessive partying. Part of this message of equality originated in and was reinforced by the associated ‘Riot Grrrl’ movement.

What is Riot Grrrl?

Riot Grrrl has been the subject of a greater amount of academic research and comment than grunge, probably due to the explicitly political feminist nature of the movement. For example, Gottlieb and Wald give an in-depth account of the origins and aims of the movement, incorporating feminist and subcultural theory. Briefly, Riot Grrrl was a women’s collective organised around the music scene, which produced fanzines and recordings, and organised and supported gigs of female musicians, while maintaining sharp social commentary on the position of females in society at large. The Riot Grrrls focused on the support females can receive from one another, and problematized the female body by talking about female desires, body parts and more taboo subjects such as incest and rape in an up-front and confrontational manner. They placed a strong emphasis on allowing younger

females to express their experiences, as demonstrated through the fact that they were ‘Grrrls’ not women (see Wald 193). Participants used their bodies as message boards by scrawling provocative words (such as ‘Slut’ and ‘Whore’) on their arms, legs and abdomens (Attwood, 236). For example, a famous photo shoot of Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love with their daughter, Francis Bean, showed the infant girl with ‘Diet Grrl’ written on her stomach. While on the one hand encouraging female support of one another, Riot Grrrl also encouraged participants to express anger that they felt at the way they had been treated or victimized due to their gender, thus colonizing the ‘traditionally’ male territory of anger (Klein).

It has been argued by some academics that since its inception in the early 1990s Riot Grrrl has become normalized and commercialized in the same way that the wider grunge movement was. They note that the appropriation of *parts* of the message of Riot Grrrl by ‘mainstream’ performers such as Alanis Morissette has the potential to spread this message further, but on the other hand takes away the DIY message of the Riot Grrrls and turns the movement into another product to be sold. As Schilt (228) notes:

It was a realistic assumption that girls inspired by Bikini Kill could and would start their own bands. But how realistic was it for girls to aspire to be the next Alanis Morissette or Baby Spice?

In the early 1990s the Riot Grrrls, tired of being misrepresented, declared a media black-out, and refused to speak to any mainstream journalists or allow documentation of their activities (Kearney 161, Rosenberg and Garofalo 810).

Despite the difficulty associated with applying genre labels authoritatively (for example, see Kirschner, Gunn), there is strong evidence that grunge was closely associated with the Riot Grrrl movement. Both grew out of the same ‘art world’ (Becker) that was centred around

Seattle in the late 1980s, and grunge had ‘important cultural connections to what Bikini Kill has called “REVOLUTION GIRL STYLE NOW”’ (Shevory 43). The Riot Grrrl label would be denied most (if not all) exclusively male bands, but the female bands involved could be—and have been—classified either as Riot Grrrl, grunge or even punk. There is demonstrably a significant overlap between these genres. For instance, as will be shown below, there is a shifting of labels of female bands between ‘grunge’ and ‘Riot Grrrl’. The two movements were geographically and temporally very close, and there was a constant sharing and exchange of personnel and ideas. One oft-repeated illustration of this interaction is in the story behind the name ‘Smells Like Teen Spirit’, which was a phrase written on the wall of Kurt Cobain’s house by Kathleen Hanna, singer of Bikini Kill and co-founder of the Riot Grrrl movement (Aizlewood 53). The use of this phrase as the title for Gottlieb and Wald’s article on Riot Grrrl discussed above reinforces this association.

A further demonstration of this overlap can be seen in a Sub Pop compilation album from 1991, ‘Sub Pop—The Grunge Years’. The tongue-in-cheek nature of the title can be seen in the cover photograph of two suited men talking on mobile phones in the back of a limousine. The album title should not, therefore, be read as a straight-forward labelling of any of the bands involved as ‘grunge’ or indicative of their acceptance of such a label. However, it does demonstrate that ‘grunge’ was an operative term at this time and suggests which bands would be described as such. Of the 13 artists included on this compilation, three (Hole, Babes in Toyland and L7) are all or almost all-female bands (the only exception being the guitarist in Hole, Eric Erlandson), and two more bands (Beat Happening and The Walkabouts) have female members. A perusal of the Sub Pop roster shows many female bands on the label, including many ostensibly ‘Riot Grrrl’ bands such as Dickless. While hardly overwhelming

female representation, this is a far more healthy showing of female musicians than in most forms of 'rock' (see Walser for a discussion of how women were excluded from genres such as hair metal). This illustrates the high female participation in grunge and the overlap between Riot Grrrl and grunge.

Despite the closeness of the two movements at their outset, over time they become increasingly separate from each other. In looking at media reports from the time, mainly concentrating on the NME, this paper will make the case for the existence of two separate 'waves' of female bands. The first was firmly a part of the grunge 'explosion' that occurred around the release of 'Nevermind' where, despite the occasional use of labels such as 'foxcore', the female bands were not singled out but were part of the wider musical movement (Cameron, Dalton). This wave included bands such as Babes in Toyland, L7, Hole and Calamity Jane, which are explicitly singled out as some of the 'best proponents' of *grunge* (Morris, Wells and Cameron). These bands are heralded as the 'new' wave of women in rock:

For all the lump-em-together bollocks that all female or female-dominated rock bands have had to endure, it would be foolish to deny that there are more and stronger role models for females in rock than at any time since the late '70s and that is A GOOD THING. (Ridges, "Strip Sleaze Artists" 49)

A lengthy article on this 'new' wave, 'The Witch Report' (Page 18) notes that: 'The fem-grunge onslaught in America has produced the celebrated, scathing foxcore of Babes in Toyland, confrontational noise merchants Hole, LA fem-metallists and "female Nirvana" L7, and an ever increasing groundswell of newer names ...', while making no mention of Riot Grrrl.

Articles such as these in the NME at this time help further illustrate the phenomenon described above whereby women are constantly rediscovered. While the female grunge bands had always been given coverage beforehand, during late 1992 and 1993 there was an explosion of articles dedicated to the 'new wave' of women in rock. While the later articles appear to have been prompted by the 'discovery' of Riot Grrrl in the UK they give coverage to women in rock more generally. With titles such as 'Rage Against the Man Machine' (unknown¹) and 'The Witch Report' (Page), these articles make claims such as:

Women have grabbed rock by the balls and made it squeal in agony ... They are reclaiming rock from the strutting, posturing macho Metal peacocks and the fey, fumbling, characterless boys and dragging it down into a cathartic sexual/emotional hell for a slice of long-overdue feminine judgment. Women are suddenly not afraid to rock. (Page 18)

This article ('The Witch Report') then goes on to reduce the women to their gender, as Davies describes, by asking a group of female artists who have little in common aside from being female questions such as 'Have you ever found it difficult to express yourself and your sexuality freely in your music?' These articles erase most previous female contributions to rock with their claims that this is the 'first' time women have done these things (although 'Rage against the Man Machine' does make the admission that women have lacked role models in music 'thanks to the untold, patriarchally obscured history of women' (unknown, "Rage Against The Man Machine" 14), and continue to reduce these women to little more than their gender, even as they claim to be doing the opposite.

However, from the start of 1993 the NME starts to report on the second wave of female bands, a 'new' phenomenon which is identified as 'Riot Grrrl' for the first time in this publication (Harris, unknown, "Love is in the Bear"). In particular, the genre-defining article

¹ In keeping with its newspaper-like format, not all articles in the NME have author by-lines, and these have been referenced as 'unknown'.

‘Rage Against the Man Machine’ (unknown, "Rage Against The Man Machine") sets out the meanings of Riot Grrrl. It identifies the movement as having been in existence for around two years, but only in the UK for six months or so. At this time, there is suddenly a clear demarcation between grunge and Riot Grrrl. For example, Courtney Love is described in terms such as ‘an influential forerunner of the Riot Grrrl movement’, thus establishing a temporal gap between one and the other.

The differences between grunge and Riot Grrrl can also be seen in the way the bands position themselves. While the newer Riot Grrrl bands such as Bikini Kill are almost militant in their feminist stance and deliberately call attention to the fact that they are female in their attempts to claim a space for women in the rock world (for example, see unknown, "Rage Against The Man Machine"), the earlier grunge bands follow a more ‘traditional’ line in asking for their music to be taken on its own merits regardless of their gender (Harris, Morris).

So while Riot Grrrl clearly exists as an entity in its own right, especially in its non-musical forms, it would appear that it has since become a convenient label for *any* female bands from this time. There is a stronger case to be made for including bands such as Hole, L7 and Babes in Toyland under the ‘grunge’ banner than that of Riot Grrrl, based on media reports of the time, statements by the bands themselves and accounts of respondents in this study. The message of Riot Grrrl gained more public attention through the success of grunge than it otherwise would have had (which was at least partially facilitated by some male grunge musicians), and musically there is often little to separate grunge from Riot Grrrl except the presence of female musicians. However, it is significant that as time has passed all female bands from this era have been pushed (not always entirely successfully) more towards the

Riot Grrrl label (for example, see Ali, Attwood, Huq 140, Nicholas). Moreover, the label 'Riot Grrrl' has increasingly been applied to any female performer (for example, see DeRogatis, Raphael), again serving to reduce women to their gender regardless of the differences between their performances. This serves to separate the women performers out from the men, leaving the label 'grunge' to describe the latter and thus allowing the entire movement to conform more to journalistic ideas of what rock is about. This is also the case in the accounts of respondents, as discussed in the following section.

The erasure of women's history can also be seen in academic writing on Riot Grrrl. Despite acknowledging the prior presence of women in rock, even Gottlieb and Wald still refer to Riot Grrrl as a new, unprecedented phenomenon, and make claims such as that the 'recent visibility of women in rock...signals greater access for women to male-dominated realms of expression' (251) without addressing why they believe this incursion of women into male territory will not suffer a similar fate to previous ones and be forgotten.

The disappearing women

Despite the prominence of female musicians at the time, both the female bands and the message of gender equality and tolerance have almost completely disappeared from the accounts of respondents, particularly male respondents.

Some of the male respondents explicitly identify grunge as a masculine thing. For example, Gordon identified it as 'mostly male', in a similar manner to other respondents:

The grunge stuff was very different because it was very deep, very masculine, but also it could be croony or it could be full of anger. (Burton)

Can you say what the sound was? Yeah, it was full, and it was generally fairly loose, ah, it had a degree of anger attached to it, and in that sense it was an honest expression of adolescent rage, you know, the new angry young man, in a way, as it's defined in the dictionary kind of – not that I'm making a sexist comment, but, you know, it was that expression of that time. (Max)

In a more practical sense, ways that respondents reported using grunge in their day-to-day lives suggested it was perceived as existing in a masculine territory. Three female respondents described using their liking of grunge as a way of improving their relationships with males they knew:

Most of the girls weren't really into music, it was like girls don't do music, sort of thing, and so I think a lot of [the boys] thought I was pretty cool because I did actually appreciate music and I could talk about music with them, whereas a lot of the other girls, you know, they wouldn't talk about music, they'd talk about other things, so that sort of put me on a different level with guys, because going to an all girls school, there's just a different sort of ... first the boys are a bit weird because they go to an all boys school, and they're like 'oh, girls', so if you can talk to them about something they relate to I think that puts you on a different level with them. So I guess that sort of changed my relationship with guys. I think I got along with them better in terms of that sort of interest because I did like music whereas a lot of the other girls didn't. (Kaye)

Do you think it changed your relationship with anyone, with people that you knew? Hmmm ... no, no I don't think so. Although maybe, maybe, my friends Jack and Barry, they really liked that I gave them that copy of that *Gluey Porch Treatment* by the Melvins, they were really sort of like 'Ohhh', it kind of gave them this new sense, cos I think they thought cos I was a girl that, you know, I wouldn't like that kind of stuff (laughs), I was just like oh no, you have no idea. (Louisa)

Did you know a lot of other people who were listening to grunge? Um ... yeah, I think ... it was mostly males, like my male friends that would be into that, a lot of my female friends were listening to whatever was on the radio and stuff like that, yeah. I think it was more my male friends in school who were into it. (Rita)

Only Louisa's account here suggests any shifting of the status quo in terms of her challenging her male friends' notions of masculine and feminine music. In the others, Rita and Kaye use what is accepted as a masculine cultural form to gain acceptance with males on their terms or

‘turf’ rather than causing any shift in the males’ perceptions. That respondents remember grunge in these masculine terms suggests that the feminist message implicit in grunge may in some ways have had little impact ‘on the ground’ in the lives of fans, making it unsurprising that this message and the female musicians are remembered less than an examination of media reports from the time may indicate.

Figure 1. 1: Bands labelled as ‘grunge’ bands by respondents

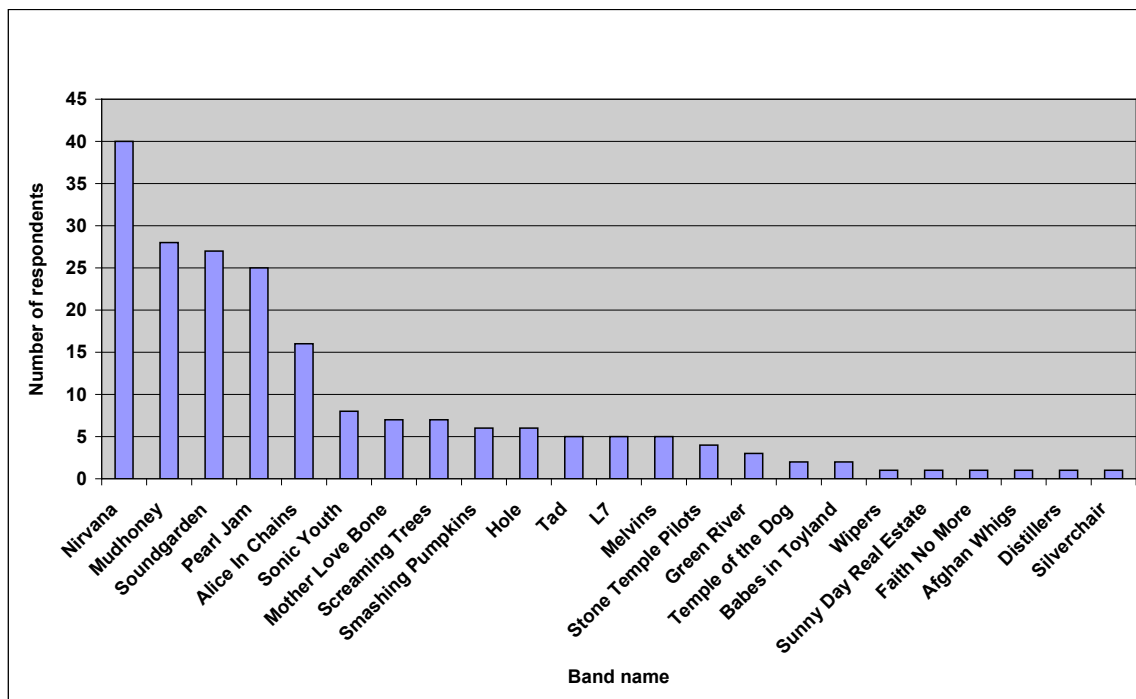


Figure 1.1 shows bands explicitly labelled as ‘grunge’ by respondents. It contains only three bands, Hole, L7 and Babes in Toyland, which would be called ‘female bands’, and two bands, Smashing Pumpkins and Sonic Youth, with female bass players. While Kim Gordon of Sonic Youth has always been portrayed as an equally participating band member, Smashing Pumpkins has been constructed as being centred around the tortured-romantic-artist figure of singer-songwriter Billy Corgan, and female bass player D’arcy reduced to the

role of ‘eye candy’ (for example, see Ridges, "Do The Ripe Thing"). As a result of this, and the fact that Sonic Youth occupied a contested position in regard to ‘grunge’ insofar as many respondents excluded the band from the category as included them, this discussion will focus more on the other three bands mentioned. These bands were also identified by the media as belonging to ‘grunge’, at least initially (as discussed above).

One question that arises in relation to this table is whether there is a correlation between commercial success and the likelihood of being remembered as ‘grunge’. To a certain extent there is such a correlation demonstrated in the chart. Nirvana and Pearl Jam were the most commercially successful grunge bands, and Soundgarden also had a number of high-selling albums in Australia (Barnes and Scanes). However, the presence of Mudhoney as the second most named grunge band causes difficulty for this claim as they have never had any significant commercial success in Australia where these interviews were conducted. The fact that they are mentioned by so many respondents could be interpreted as an attempt on the part of respondents to lay claim to a certain amount of cultural capital by being fans of a more obscure band who are also seen as ‘pioneers’ of the movement. The amount of success achieved by L7 and particularly Hole would be on a par with, if not greater than, that of Alice in Chains or the Screaming Trees. However it would appear that female bands have not become markers of cultural capital in the same way that male bands are to the majority of respondents.

Taking L7, who were mentioned by five respondents, as an example, two of the respondents who discussed them were female (although one of them [Michelle] wasn’t quite sure if they were ‘grunge’ or not) and two were males who had worked in a company responsible for

distributing L7's music in Australia and thus had a greater reason to remember them and regard them as important. The fifth respondent was a male, one of the last interviewees, who was asked directly about female bands, since their absence from interview data was beginning to become apparent:

Did you ever listen to any of the female bands associated with it, like Hole or L7? Yeah...Hole, Courtney Love is just a dirty rock slut (laughs), there's no other way to put it, I mean the way that she met Kurt (inaudible), she came over when they were both drunk, didn't even introduce herself, and poured a drink from his jug. How dirty rock slut is that? And good looking girls know they can get away with that stuff. L7 I didn't really get into, Courtney Love, I saw Hole but didn't really get into it. (Percy)

What is noticeable here (aside from the negative characterization of Courtney Love) is that the respondent does not dispute the inclusion of bands like Hole and L7 under the label 'grunge', but needed prompting to remember them. The same phenomenon emerged in the other interview involving this question, implying that the reason for disregarding female bands is not that respondents had never heard of them in the first place or were unaware of their association with grunge, but they have not been retained in their memories in a way that makes it important or relevant to mention them when discussing grunge.

As the grunge movement has become more and more distant in memory, so have the female participants in the scene become reduced in stature and importance in the media also, with the significant exception of Courtney Love. The tenth anniversary of Cobain's death spawned a number of magazine articles which gave retrospective accounts of the grunge era. The text of these articles focused exclusively on the male bands, predominantly Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Soundgarden and Mudhoney, and the two male founders of Sub Pop. A number of these articles include lists of 'The Best Grunge Albums', and here women do appear, but only if the

list is long enough. *Mojo* magazine's 'Early grunge classics' (Alexander) lists only 5 albums, with no female artists included. *Revolver*'s 'Flyin' the Flannel; 10 essential grunge albums' (Tepedelen) also contains no female artists. However, lists of 20 or more albums find room for the female bands. For example, *Spin*'s '20 Greatest Grunge Albums of All Time' places Hole (*Live Through This*) at 7, L7 (*Bricks are Heavy*) at 11 and Babes in Toyland (*Spanking Machine*) at 16 (Beaujon, Dolan, Ganz and Gross). *Guitar One*'s 'Plaid to the Bone; The 25 Greatest Grunge Albums' includes as the last and third to last albums listed Hole's *Pretty on the Inside* and Babes In Toyland's *Spanking Machine* (a Smashing Pumpkins album also appears on this list). This again shows the grunge canon being reclaimed as a male space.

The relationship between collective or cultural memory and what is reported in the media is complex, and the accounts of respondents suggest that the message of gender equality in grunge may never have impacted greatly on audiences. However, a greater understanding needs to be developed of how and why the disappearance of women occurs and what role the media plays as record keepers. This paper has demonstrated above that despite the importance of female bands and musicians at the height of grunge's popularity, they are rarely mentioned by fans of the genre when they discuss it, and are disappearing from media accounts. Where bands such as Hole, L7 and Babes in Toyland have not been forgotten, they have been conveniently subsumed into the Riot Grrrl movement, despite not being part of it at the time. This move serves to separate women's history out from a more mainstream male history, allowing journalists to bring the story of grunge in line with more typical rock narratives. This is reinforced by the way the grunge canon has been constructed as an almost exclusively male space. Separating the female performers out also serves to compartmentalise them, and the Riot Grrrl label has become a convenient way of accomplishing this.

In this way, women's history fails to live on, both in written accounts and in the memories of people who participated at the time. This fits in with the societal-wide pattern of women's history being lost, and with the pattern of the participation (and emancipation) of women being repeatedly heralded as new. If the accomplishments of women in the past are constantly forgotten, it makes it easier for each new generation—as with the journalists in the music press—to congratulate themselves on the progressive nature of society. As this occurs, the same questions are constantly asked about the position of women, without an answer ever being required.

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